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zoom **in on america**

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RODEO



Tourists look over a sculpture at the Cowboy Artists of America Museum, in Kerrville, Texas. The sculpture entitled "An Honest Day's Work," is one of many exhibits on the 10-acre property dedicated to the history of the American cowboy. (Photo AP Images)

Regardless of what emotions rodeo evokes today, or whether its advocates are more numerous than its opponents, it cannot be denied that the sport played an important role in creating the identity, and indeed culture, of a young country, the United States of America. The roots of rodeo are to be found in the second half of the 19th century among people who themselves became a myth and a legend - cowboys. As some said about them, cowboys were "half-human and half-horse." Though the description sounds a bit far-fetched, once a cowboy set off on cattle-drive, he rarely dismounted from his faithful companion, the horse. The working hours were long - about 18 - and the weekdays were long - 7 - adding up to weeks and months. The trail led from southern Texas north to the meat markets

in Kansas through a thousand miles of grazing lands in Texas and Oklahoma. What could a cowboy know better than to ride a horse? What better way to entertain than to compete with the others of his kind? And this is how rodeo started. The first recorded rodeo contest is supposed to have taken place in eastern Colorado, near a town called Deer Trail in 1869. At that time there were no rules, no entry fees, no spectators, and no cash prizes. The winner - an Englishman Emilnie Grandeshire - got a new suit of clothes for his victory over the best rough rider of the rival ranch. Today, rodeo is a popular sport with participants competing for money. The National Rodeo Finals debuted in 1959 in Dallas, but since 1985 they have been held in Las Vegas.

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Rodeo Events

Modern rodeo competitions consist of four timed and three rough stock events. The timed events include steer wrestling, calf roping, team roping, and barrel racing. The rough stock events include bareback, saddle bronc, and bullriding. In the **steer wrestling** event (which is also known as bulldogging), the cowboy jumps from a running horse and wrestles a steer (a male castrated bovine animal about a year old) to the ground by twisting its horns. In the **calf-roping** event the cowboy must rope and tie a running calf. The calf starts ahead of the horse from a chute. While they gallop across the arena, the cowboy swings a loop of his rope over the calf's head and casts it toward the calf. When the calf is caught in the rope, the cowboy dismounts the horse and the horse keeps the line taut. The roper then throws the calf to the ground and ties his three legs with the rope. The **team-roping** event involves two men and a steer. Two cowboys ride alongside while the steer gallops between them. The header - the rider who rides ahead - ropes the steer's horns and the heeler - the one behind - casts his rope to catch both back legs. **Barrel racing**, which in some rodeos is an optional event, is the only all-female event in which the cowgirl steers her horse through a cloverleaf pattern around three barrels crisscrossing the arena.

The rough stock events are perhaps more exciting to watch for rodeo lovers, especially that it is the animal that "wins" most of the time.

Broncs (unbroken or imperfectly broken mustangs) that work in most rodeos are usually bred as buck-

ing horses rather than wild animals. They seem to perfectly understand what is expected of them and take pleasure in throwing the unwanted load of a cowboy off their back. In **bareback bronc riding** the cowboy is only allowed to hang to a horse with a belt called a surcingle or a rigging passed over a horse's back. In **saddle bronc riding** the cowboy uses a saddle and hangs onto a horse with a rope attached to a halter on the horse, which is called a bronc rein. In rough stock events two or more good riders on horseback accompany the cowboy to pick him up when he falls or help him get off the animal if he is successful and remains mounted. In **bullriding**, on the other hand, there are clowns running to and fro across the arena to distract the bull's attention from a fallen cowboy. Bullriding is by no means a safe event for the cowboy and sometimes a special protective vest is worn that saves his life when an angry bull is not pulled away by the clowns' antics and manages to vent his fury on his rider.

Those who are not rodeo professional performers but would like to test how long they would last on a running and spinning bull, can try themselves out on a ... mechanical bull. Mechanical bulls can be found in bars and restaurants across America. In their appearance the machines resemble real bulls. Once mounted and put in operation, they give the rider a similar sensation to that of riding a bucking bull. Although speed and spinning can be controlled, the rider may be thrown off the machine. To prevent injuries, the floor around the mechanical bull is padded, but a broken bone may well be the price for imitating the skills of a real cowboy.



(left): Albert the horse with the highest I.Q. in the world, demonstrates unlimited talent in his film debut in the comedy, "The Bride Wore Boots," Dec. 1, 1945. (above): Sixteen-time World Champion All-Around Cowboy and nine-time World Champion Saddle Bronc Rider Dan Dailey shows off his skills in saddle bronc riding at the Great Northeastern Championship Rodeo in Yonkers, N.Y., July 2, 1994; (right): Two stallions battle for leadership rights to a harem of wild horses on the Pryor Mountains Wild Horse Range in Montana, June 25, 1999.



All Photos AP Images

The Rider's Myth Lives On

An image of a mysterious rider dressed all in black, a mask on his face, mounted on a horse that bucks up dramatically, both silhouetted against the darkened sky lit by a zigzag lightening became an icon of cinematography. The 1957 TV series "Zorro" managed to implant a lasting image of a rider and his faithful horse that appeals to our imagination in spite of the passing of time. The special relationship between a rider and his horse has long been an inspiration for composers and film makers among other artists.

One of the common themes of rodeo films is the life of legendary bareback riders such as Bruce Ford ("Colorado Cowboy: The Bruce Ford Story," 1994), or Lane Frost ("8 Seconds," 1994, starring Luke Perry and Stephen Baldwin.) Other rodeo movies explore themes related to the life of the cowboy, the ranching family, the disappearing cowboy world or the relation between the rider and the animal. "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys (1991), "Cowboy Way" (1994), "Cowboy Up" (2001), Pure Country (1992), "Everything That Rises" (1998), "J.W. Coop" (1972) and "Junior Bonner" (1972) are some of the rodeo films titles.

In a list of musical pieces devoted to rodeo, a ballet "Rodeo" with music by Aaron Copland - a composer who drew richly from American folk styles - deserves a mention. "Hoedown" which includes motives evoking the trotting of horses is one of the most popular pieces. Aaron Copland is also the author of another cowboy ballet, "Billy the Kid". Chris Lee LeDoux, who was a country music singer-songwriter, a sculptor and a rodeo champion, not only sang of rodeos and cowboys, but sometimes rode a mechanical bull during his concerts. His well-known songs include "Whatcha Gonna Do With a Cowboy" and "Take Me to the Rodeo". Michael Martin Murphey is yet another singer and songwriter who devoted his career to western music.

Even though policemen on horseback can still be seen in the streets of some cities, while horse-driven carts still take tourists on city-center tours, and occasional parades still feature harnessed horses with historically clad riders on their backs, man generally traded live animals for horse-powered ... cars. However, as can be seen from the descriptions of the photos below, there are still men who do not follow the mainstream trends.



Educator and Horseman Miles Dean, second from left, a social studies teacher, is escorted by members of the Black Heritage Riders downtown Los Angeles on a half-year, 6,000-mile Horseback journey from New York to California with a goal of heightening awareness of black cowboys and other African-Americans who helped forge American history. Dean started his journey in Lower Manhattan on September 22, 2007. (Photo AP Images)



Mick Thompson of Wyoming traveling through Huntington, West Virginia, on April 29, 2008, on his horse, Hawkeye, while carrying his dog, Yogi, on his lap. Thompson says he and his dog have been traveling on horseback across the country since 2003. Having started his journey on the West Coast of Oregon, Thompson plans to make it all the way to Maine to eat lobster. "I grew up on a cattle ranch," he said. "Don't you ever get tired of beef?" (Photo AP Images)

Activity Page

■ Exercise 1 What do you call the rodeo events in which:

1. the rider is supposed to steer the horse around three barrels.
2. the rider is supposed to hang on to a horse with only a rigging.
3. two riders are supposed to rope the steer's horns and catch its back legs with a rope.
4. the rider can sit in a saddle and is supposed to hang onto a horse with a bronc rein.

■ Exercise 2 There are many different ways in which we articulate our words. There are also many verbs which describe these ways e.g.: shout, say, cry, yell, whisper, scream, declare, roar, murmur, speak, whistle, mutter, lisp, sing, mumble, exclaim, choke, announce.

Put the words from the list above in sentences 1-14. Use appropriate tenses. Some words can be used more than once.

1. The teacher at me when I made the same mistake again instead of explaining the problem patiently.
2. She felt so happy that she a joyous tune while she was walking home.
3. "Don't you dare to call me a crooked man again," an old man and waved his walking stick threateningly at a group of teenagers who were teasing him.
4. "I hate cleaning my room on a Saturday morning," little Paul to himself, but out loudly to his mom downstairs: "Just a moment, Mom."
5. She sometimes her words and instead of calling me Chris she calls me Chlis.
6. "..... clearly, children, don't your words, the teacher to her pupils."
7. She with admiration when she saw her friend trying on a beautiful wedding dress.
8. The dream was a nightmare and Betty in her sleep.
9. From now on you must address me "Boss", he to the rest of the staff.
10. The lion so loudly that we out and backed away from its enclosure.
11. Lucy wanted to give her answer to the question, but she wasn't certain of it, so she only it almost inaudibly.
12. Then my boss the good news: "I have put your name for promotion."
13. The heat and the dust dried his lips and caked his tongue so he was only able to "Water" when we found him.
14. "I do not speak English well," a tourist to the guide at the end of the tour, "but I will you a song in my language," and started in the street.

■ Exercise 3 Describe the picture to another student, read the caption and discuss your ideas about training horses.



(in the photo): Tim Schaack tries to gain the trust of a young colt at the Haythorn Ranch near Arthur, Nebraska, March 23, 2004. At the Haythorn Ranch, it is clear that the popular image of the Western horseman is due for revisions. Gone are the days when the only way to get a horse to take a saddle was for a cocky, young man to jump on the animal's back and hold on until the horse gave up. First brought to the attention of the American public with the 1998 Hollywood film "The Horse Whisperer," a gentle form of horse training rooted in the West has slowly become the standard.
Photo AP Images

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